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Major Works by Contemporary Artist Sol LeWitt at CMA

CLEVELAND — Sol LeWitt (born 1928) is considered one of the most innovative and influential American artists since the 1960s — a pioneer in minimal and conceptual art. **Sol LeWitt: Incomplete Open Cubes** is the first comprehensive exhibition focusing on the artist's *Variations on an Incomplete Open Cube* (1973–74), a pivotal series of sculptures in which he systematically explored 122 permutations of a three-dimensional open cube. The show just opened at the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) and will remain on view through Dec. 30, 2001. It includes 30 full-scale cubes (each 40 x 40 x 40 inches) borrowed from international public and private collections. Also included in the exhibition is a smaller-scale version of the entire series, comprising 122 wooden structures on a wood base, plus approximately 40 working drawings and 131 framed schematic renderings (to be shown in gallery 240). **The full-size cubes are installed throughout 18 of the museum's permanent collection galleries and the south lobby**, stimulating comparisons with art of earlier centuries. Admission is *free*.

The exhibition was organized by the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn., where it premiered early this year.

"The *Incomplete Open Cubes* are subtle, sophisticated, and have been highly influential in contemporary art," explains Tom Hinson, CMA's curator for the exhibition. "They are the most elaborate and elegant expression of LeWitt's use of seriality. The placement of the cubes in the museum's permanent collection galleries underscores the radical nature of LeWitt's work and opens new dialogues between the art of our time and the art of the past."

The Cubes

Each cube is made of white baked enamel on aluminum. The cubes begin with three edges, the minimum number to suggest the volume of an open cube, and culminate in an 11-part variation, one side short of a complete cube. Each variation is a distinctive sculpture, whose "missing" edges can be reconstructed in the viewer's imagination. Complementary pairs, such as *Incomplete Open Cube 5/12* and *7/11* (in gallery 215, late Gothic), which together would make a complete cube, are included in the show.

The five delicate lines of *Incomplete Open Cube 5/7* can be seen in the context of the museum's 17th- and 18th-century British art collection (gallery 225/226).

The Beginnings of Conceptual Art

In the early 1960s, Sol LeWitt and many other artists of his generation felt that art making had come to stress the appearance of the final product over its content. LeWitt attempted to redress this balance by shifting the focus back to the *idea* or concept that generated the creation of a work of art. *Incomplete Open Cubes* began with a simple idea: if you take an open cube and systematically subtract its parts, how many variations are created? After months of detailed and laborious figuring he identified the 122 unique variations of the open cube. LeWitt had formulated an objective system or "machine" (as opposed to subjective judgment or intuition) that, once put into operation, generated a work of art. This exhibition affords visitors the special opportunity to observe LeWitt's working methodology and to see an idea explored in a variety of media, including photographs, working drawings, an artist's book, and three-dimensional structures of three sizes.

The Artistic Process

LeWitt first attempted to figure out all the variations of the incomplete open cube on paper. He developed an alphabetical labeling system and later, a numerical one, but neither solved the problem of repeating variations — the same variation, when rotated on paper, could look like a new permutation of the incomplete cube. Ultimately, three-dimensional models, some made from bent paper clips, were used to definitively identify each variation. The variety of media in this exhibition, including *Working Drawings for Incomplete Open Cubes* (1973–74), conveys the process and solutions LeWitt identified. As LeWitt put it in 1967: "*If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps — scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations — are of interest.*"

Gallery Talks

Guest gallery talks will be offered by independent scholar Ginger Spivey Oct. 26 at 6:30 p.m. and Oct. 28 at 1:30 p.m. John Pearson, The Young Hunter Professor of Art at Oberlin College, will give a guest gallery talk Nov. 9 at 6:30 p.m. Tom Hinson will offer a curatorial gallery talk Nov. 30 at 6:30 p.m.

Gallery talks led by CMA education staff will be given Sept. 23 and Sept. 26 at 1:30 p.m., and Sept. 28 at 6 p.m.

Catalogue

The 112-page paperback catalogue includes essays by exhibition organizer Nicholas Baume, the Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art; Jonathan Flatley; and Pamela M. Lee. The book, illustrated with color and black-and-white photographs, will be available for \$22.95.

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For more information about the CMA and its events, call **1-888-CMA-0033** or visit www.clevelandart.org.

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